Endings and Beginnings at JNCCN

For many of us growing up, September is a time of ending (summer) and beginning (as school starts). For JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network in 2013, September is very much a time of ending and new beginning. We say goodbye and thank you to Dr. Hal Burstein, who steps down as editor-in-chief at the end of his 5-year term, and we look for a new editor with whom to begin the next chapter in JNCCN’s story.

Since the first issue was published in January 2003, JNCCN has had a full history, and we at NCCN are grateful for the thoughtful and dedicated editors and publishers who stewarded the journal to early and continued success. This list begins in 2002 with the late Dr. Rodger Winn, then medical director of NCCN, who worked with NCCN staff and the journal’s first publisher, Jones & Bartlett in Massachusetts, to envision a new publication. This publication would make the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) more available and available in an enduring way. Thus, JNCCN launched as the only regularly published print source of the NCCN Guidelines.

But Dr. Winn and colleagues also understood that, since the NCCN Guidelines appeared (and still appear) online at NCCN.org, the journal must include more content to be truly valuable to readers. Furthermore, the online versions of the NCCN Guidelines are regularly updated, a feat not possible in a quarterly publication, as JNCCN was at its launch in January 2003.

Instead, Dr. Winn and NCCN saw JNCCN as a combination of the NCCN Guidelines and review articles that expanded on the basic topics discussed in those guidelines. Each issue included 1 to 3 themes (eg, breast cancer), with the articles—authored by experts and thought leaders from both within and outside of NCCN Member Institutions—adding depth to the guidelines discussion, exploring controversies, or looking down the road to new developments and treatments that were not yet standard of care. The journal also included thoughtful commentaries and editorials, often from Dr. Winn and the panel chairs who serve as issue editors.

This themed model served JNCCN well, and the journal enjoyed early success in the oncology community as measured by independent readership surveys and was accepted for indexing in PubMed in 2005. But the journal also suffered setbacks with untimely deaths. In 2006, Dr. Christopher Desch, who’d come to NCCN as Medical Director after Dr. Winn moved to another position and served as co-Editor-in-Chief with Dr. Winn, died in a plane crash. And then in 2007, Dr. Winn died of esophageal cancer after a courageous struggle during which he continued to guide and write for JNCCN.

In mid-2008, Dr. Burstein joined JNCCN. As the journal’s longest-serving editor-in-chief, Dr. Burstein has provided many new ideas and steady leadership. He helped ensure a seamless transition as JNCCN moved to a new publisher, Harborside Press, in 2009. Then, after reader surveys and focus groups suggested that fully themed issues were no longer as useful to readers, Dr. Burstein guided the journal through a more complex transition—to a new editorial model that mixes “mini themes” with multiple diverse articles.

Throughout these changes, JNCCN has been and remains committed to its mission of improving the quality of cancer care and enhancing the collaboration between academic medicine and the community physician. We thank Dr. Burstein for his service in furthering this mission, and we thank our readers for their continuing support.

As JNCCN moves into a new chapter, we encourage you to participate in the conversation. Comments and suggestions are always welcome via e-mail to JNCCN@nccn.org, and qualified applicants are encouraged to submit CVs for the editor-in-chief position (please see the Call for Applications on the previous page).

The ideas and viewpoints expressed in this editorial are those of the author and do not necessarily represent any policy, position, or program of NCCN.